

## **Divine Sovereignty** *and Human Responsibility*

Much has been written on the topic of God's sovereignty and its relationship to human responsibility. In this course, the subject has already been introduced in our examination of the sinfulness of humanity. If sinful humans are not morally capable (i.e., inherently willing apart from the Spirit) to respond rightly to God, then He must take the initiative both in salvation generally and in individual conversion.

This section of notes introduces the subject of God's saving initiative in the context of His general providence. These notes are not intended to summarize all of the speculation in this area, which has been extensive, nor are they intended to propose yet another simplistic solution. (Buechner: "Theorizing about God this way is like an isosceles triangle trying to theorize the Great Pyramid of Cheops into the two dimensions of the printed page.") These notes are intended to provoke thought and establish parameters within which to consider the relevant issues from a biblical context.

### **The Context of Election: God's Providential Rule**

In order to adequately understand the sovereignty of God as it relates to these issues, we begin by considering some biblical examples of His providence. In these examples we see God ruling over each situation, but not always taking an obvious role in changing the course of events. It may be helpful to distinguish between providential *permission*, in which God allows events to proceed in a given direction in accordance with His purposes, and providential *intervention*, in which He takes a more active role in directing events in accordance with His purposes. His purposes are accomplished either way, but providential permission places a little more emphasis on human responsibility.

### **Joseph and the Egyptian Captivity**

In Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham as an introduction to His unconditional covenant,

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.

God promised Abraham that this would surely take place, *yet it was accomplished through a complicated web of human choices, even sinful human choices*. Note the many human elements involved here:

Jacob deceived his father Isaac and fled from the wrath of his brother Esau. He fell in love with Rachel (largely because of her physical appearance) but was deceived into marrying Leah. He

ended up married to both women, but he didn't have much affection for Leah, whom the text describes as "unloved" in spite of his apparent commitment to her well-being (Gen. 29:31). His lopsided affection for Rachel fostered a rivalry between the women that caused them both to encourage Jacob to sleep with their servants, producing more children. The rivalry continued throughout Jacob's lifetime, as he continually favored Rachel and her children over all the others (Gen. 33:1-2; 37:3-4). The sons themselves obviously understood all of this, for Joseph (the oldest son of Rachel) became arrogant and his brothers hated him enough that they sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:27-28). This brought Joseph to Egypt, where he worked hard but wound up in jail because his boss's wife tried to sleep with him and then lied about it. While in jail he got to know some royal officials who were doing time because they had offended a ruler with a bad temper, and one of them later introduced him to the Pharaoh so he could interpret a dream. That got him out of jail, and his new friend the Pharaoh gave him quite a lot of authority. About the same time, there was a famine in the land, and Jacob heard there was food in Egypt. He rather sarcastically sent his sons down to get some (42:1,2), and they ran into Joseph, who eventually reunited the whole family down there.

The end of the story is well known. Joseph credited God with the responsibility for his trip to Egypt and his influential job (45:5-9). He told his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (50:20). God brought the nation down to Egypt to preserve them, but He did not miraculously transport them all there. Dozens of people made sinful choices that were in fact acts of rebellion against God, but He used those choices to produce the result He desired.

Does that mean that God made the choices for them? Did He place it in the hearts of Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery? Did He get Potiphar's wife to make a pass at Joseph so he would be in the right place at the right time? The text makes no suggestion of the idea that God initiated the sinful behavior. It only tells us that He used it to produce a good result in spite of the way it was intended by the individuals involved.

God had also told Abraham that the people would leave Egypt "with many possessions." How was this accomplished? Exodus 12:35,36 tells us that they obeyed the Lord's command to simply ask the Egyptians for silver, gold, and clothing, "and the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request." This does not seem to have come naturally to the Egyptians, and one would not expect it to. Here God seems to have intervened, doing something in the hearts of the Egyptians to provide this plunder for Israel.

A similar situation may be found in the battles through which Israel conquered the land. Joshua 10:8-14 recounts several ways in which God "threw" the battle between Joshua and the Amorite kings. He clearly intervened in order to accomplish His purposes, both in miraculous events (sending hailstones and lengthening the day) and in less obvious acts ("confounding" the enemy). The text does not suggest that He set up the battle by telling the Amorites to attack, only that He intervened to bring it to a rapid conclusion.

God fulfilled His promise to Abraham in spite of the sinful choices made by individuals all along the way. On occasion, He intervened directly. At other times, He seems to have allowed mankind's sinful activities to continue toward a predetermined end.

### **The Coronation of a King**

According to 1 Samuel 16:1, God rejected Saul and chose David as the new king after Saul's disobedience. (The text reads literally, "I see a king for Myself." Simple foreknowledge, sovereign election, or both?) Samuel anointed David soon after, but he did not sit on the throne until much later.

David's ascent to the throne was no less complex than Jacob's trip to Egypt. Even after his lengthy flight from Saul and the death of Saul and Jonathan, David was made king only over Judah. Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, was king over Israel (2 Sam. 2:10,11). David became king over the united kingdom only after long process that began with a bloody contest between Abner (Ishbosheth's general) and Joab (David's general). In the battle, Abner killed one of Joab's brothers, who had challenged him recklessly. Abner's own troubles mounted when Ishbosheth accused him (rightly or wrongly) of sleeping with one of Saul's concubines. In his anger toward Ishbosheth, Abner began supporting David, encouraging the elders of Israel to rebel against their king and make David their new leader. When he paid a visit to David, Joab killed him to avenge the death of his brother. The death of Abner then caused Ishbosheth's other commanders to abandon him, and they killed him in his bed in an attempt to gain favor with David. He condemned their actions and killed those commanders, but the elders of Israel did make David their new king in place of Ishbosheth.

How did David become king? The circumstances were created through another soap opera of sinful choices on the part of self-seeking individuals, and he was given the office through the acclamation of the nation's leaders. At the same time, however, David said that "the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel" (2 Sam. 5:12). Once again, God's purposes are accomplished in spite of and through the choices of sinful individuals.

### **Esther and Ahasuerus**

The king of Persia, Ahasuerus, put on a serious party for his friends – it lasted 180 days. He then put on a shorter one, lasting seven days, in which "the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty" (Esth. 1:7). His wife, Vashti, was partying across the hall with the women in the palace, and the king thought it would be fun to have her come over and entertain all the men. Call it pride or self-respect, rebellion or disgust, she refused, and he angrily banished her from his presence. Ahasuerus then began a beauty contest in search of a new queen. He gathered "many" beautiful girls to the capital, including Esther, one of the Jews who continued to live in Susa in spite of the fact that the exile was technically over. The king slept with the young women one at a time, trying to decide who he liked best, and Esther won the contest (2:17), so he made her his new queen. The rest just became concubines.

The providential nature of this whole process became evident when Haman, one of the highest officials in the land, set out to destroy the Jews. Mordecai, Esther's uncle, encouraged her to use her new position of influence to stop Haman's plan. He said, "Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (4:14). Esther attained royalty because she was able to please a lustful barbarian of a king. He chose her quite freely, with literally every woman in the kingdom at his disposal, yet behind all of this debauchery there was apparently a divine purpose.

Esther was the wrong woman in the wrong place at the wrong time, but God used her for a right cause. She was there for a reason. Does that mean that God twisted the mind of the king? He seems to have just picked the prettiest girl he could find. What did God do? His name is not even mentioned in this book, and he is not seen taking the initiative to intervene. He governed the situation providentially, allowing individuals to make the choices that came naturally to them, yet overseeing the end result in accordance with His purposes.

### **The Crucifixion of Jesus**

What brought Jesus to the cross?

In Acts 2, Peter recognizes the "double responsibility" that comes through God's providential use of human choices. In verse 23, he says, "this Man, *delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." The act was part of the predetermined plan of God. He certainly could have prevented it (Matt. 26:53), but He instead welcomed it because He knew what would be gained (John 10:17-18; Heb. 12:2).

Did God put it in the mind of Judas to betray Christ? No! He was inspired by Satan himself (Luke 22:3; John 13:2,27). God allowed it, and Jesus even told him to get on with it, but Judas should not be thought of as acting on divine initiative.

## Conclusion

In these and many other examples, God does not always seem to have to intervene to accomplish His purposes, which are frequently achieved through the choices of individuals. His overall sovereignty is evident in His prophetic promises and in the final result, but He only takes the initiative to intervene on occasion. Perhaps such intervention is most necessary when, as with the Egyptians giving up their wealth, something must happen that would not have happened given the normal course of events. People can be expected to make sinful, self-centered choices, but perhaps righteous actions are more directly the result of divine intervention. Ahasuerus did not need a nudge from above in order to select Esther, but the Egyptians would not have surrendered their wealth without a little help.

In any case, God rules over all of these events and always has the power to intervene and redirect the course of history. When He chooses not to intervene, His purposes are yet accomplished through the choices and actions of individuals operating under His providential government.

Another way to look at this is to consider the example of prophecy. In John 11:49-52, Caiaphus, the high priest, "prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation." The text does not describe him as being conscious of the fact that God was speaking through him in this instance, and he did not even intend that his statement be understood the way God evidently meant it. He was making a pragmatic suggestion that was by divine providence a prophetic insight into the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

What is the difference between this statement and any other uttered by Caiaphus? From his perspective, there probably was none. He was just talking. From a divine perspective, however, this statement was unique. God had intervened, speaking through the high priest, who apparently retained a measure of authority through the office in spite of his rejection of Christ. What about Caiaphus's other statements? Was God speaking through him when he said that Jesus had blasphemed (Matt. 26:65)? Apparently not. God had left him to his own devices. What the man said was not outside of God's control, for He always has the ability to speak through individuals or even through animals if He chooses to exercise it. Nothing is said that He does not allow to be said, but He does not always initiate what is said, as He apparently does in the case of prophecy.

Relating this example to the issue of salvation, is it possible that what seems like an independent human decision, made like any other, is in retrospect one directed by the Spirit of God? More specifically, could one's acceptance of the gospel be like that — a personal choice responding to (perhaps unseen) divine initiative? In the same way, could one's rejection of the gospel be a personal choice made within the constraints of divine permission? Might His purposes be established even through such choices?

Following this model, one could say that those who reject the gospel act on their own initiative, not God's. He may at any time interrupt the course of events and intervene in order to

accomplish His purposes, but He rules over the world in such a way that His purposes are accomplished even when He does not actively intervene. Again, even when He does intervene, most of the time He apparently continues to incorporate human choices. Caiaphus chose his own words, yet "did not speak from himself." The authors of Scripture "spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:21) – yet at the same time we can see distinct differences in style and emphasis from one author to another. They choose their words, yet God works through them in such a way that the words are His own. The convert chooses Christ, but does not do so independently.

### Implications

This understanding of God's providential rule has several implications with regard to the issue of election.

#### 1. God is not the author of sin.

This speaks for itself. He does not intervene to produce sinful attitudes or actions, but instead must intervene to prevent them.

#### 2. We should not regard predestination as "double," at least not with equal ultimacy.

If God does not initiate *every* action, but only those which would not take place apart from His intervention, then He should not be thought of as initiating sinful actions or the rejection of the gospel on the part of the lost. He leaves them in their sin and they bear the consequences. He does not intervene.

Sproul argues that this is the correct statement of the Calvinist position. He writes,

There are different views of double predestination. One of these is so frightening that many shun the term altogether, lest their view of the doctrine be confused with the scary one. This is called the equal ultimacy view.

Equal ultimacy is based on a concept of symmetry. It seeks a complete balance between election and reprobation. The key idea is this: Just as God intervenes in the lives of the elect to create faith in their hearts, so God equally intervenes in the lives of the reprobate to create or work unbelief in their hearts. . . .

Equal ultimacy is *not* the Reformed or Calvinist view of predestination. Some have called it "hyper-Calvinism." I prefer to call it "sub-Calvinism" or, better yet, "anti-Calvinism." . . .

The Reformed view teaches that God positively or actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to insure their salvation. The rest of mankind God leaves to themselves. He does not create unbelief in their hearts. That unbelief is already there. He does not coerce them to sin. They sin by their own choices. (*Chosen by God*, 142-43)

#### 3. God must intervene in some way for individuals to respond to the gospel.

If the natural tendency of all is to go against God, as Scripture and experience certainly seem to demonstrate (Rom. 3), then individuals would act in a self-centered and rebellious way if left to their own devices. That there is in fact some form of intervention on the part of the elect will be the subject of our next lesson.

4. God's intervention need not violate the personal choice of individuals.

We can go around and around about what is meant by "free will," but all such debates are greatly complicated by the fact that the expression is not found in Scripture. It was argued above that God's purposes are accomplished both through His intervention and through His providential permission and that He incorporates responsible human choices either way.

Beyond this point, it's also important to note that choices can be "real" and can have consequences even when not all options are available. In the case of the unbelievers who are left to their own sin (i.e., "reprobate"), they are free to do what they choose but not free to do whatever is conceivable. When they fail to respond to the gospel, they fail to respond because they are unwilling (John 8:43-44; Matt. 23:37; John 5:40).

**Living With Biblical Tension Under Providence**

It was suggested above that the providence of God results in a kind of "double responsibility," in which events take place through individual choice under the providential rule of God. On the one hand, individuals are responsible, but on the other hand, God is ultimately in control. This biblical tension is well known with regard to the topic of salvation, but it is worth highlighting here with a contrast between a few selected texts. In each case, an attempt has been made to show examples of both sides in the same context. One must not be emphasized to the exclusion of the other.

<b>Sovereignty</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Matt. 11:25-27	Matt. 11:28-29
Matt. 13:10-11	Matt. 13:53-58
Matt. 16:15-17	Matt. 15:28; 16:1-12
Luke 8:10	Luke 7:50
Luke 10:21	Luke 10:42
John 1:13	John 1:11-12
John 5:21	John 5:24, 40
John 6:44-45, 64-65, 70	John 6:40, 66-69
John 10:26	John 10:9
Acts 2:39	Acts 2:38-39
Acts 4:27-28	Acts 3:13-19
Acts 13:48	Acts 13:46, 48
Acts 16:14	Acts 16:30-34
Romans 9:1-29; 11:1-36	Romans 9:30 - 10:21
Ephesians 1:4-5	Ephesians 1:13

These few passages should be sufficient to demonstrate that both human responsibility and divine sovereignty are maintained at every level. They should not be regarded as contradictory, for

in the providence of God He accomplishes His purposes through responsible human choices even when He chooses to intervene.

It should be noted that salvation is one area in which God must intervene. It was argued above that He does not (and would not) actively intervene in order to cause an individual to turn away from Him. When left to their own devices (when given a longer rope), people do not need any help in rebelling against God. On the other hand, God must intervene in order for any to freely choose Him. This is evident in the brief "order of salvation" provided by Paul in Romans 8:29-30.

### **"Calling" and Divine Initiative in Salvation**

The familiar words of Romans 8:28 read, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Another reading, with wider but not necessarily stronger manuscript support, is "all things work together . . ." In either case, this is a statement of God's providential rule over all of life, as in the examples which began this set of notes.

Cranfield rightly observes that this is of particular comfort to those who are experiencing persecution (8:18, 35-39). He writes,

Paul's meaning is that all things, even those which seem most adverse or hurtful, such as persecution or death itself, are profitable to those who love God. . . . But the reason why all things thus assist believers is, of course, that God is in control of all things. The faith expressed here is not in things but in God. . . . His power, His authority, is such that all things, even the actions of those who are disobedient and set themselves against Him, must subserve His will [*Commentary on Romans*, 1:428-29].

It is also important to note that Paul's statement is not intended to say that God providentially manipulates all events to maintain our happiness or comfort. As Cranfield once again observes, "What he means is that they 'assist our salvation.'" Dunn rightly places this in the context of Paul's hope in verses 18-25. He is longing for the eschatological climax of our salvation, and "his confidence rests . . . on the outworking of God's purpose *through* all the contradiction and frustration of the present to its intended end" [*Word Biblical Commentary* 38A, 481].

That intended end is stated in verse 30—the final glorification of believers. Paul builds up to it by noting the logical sequence of God's work in salvation: "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Though he begins with the concept of foreknowledge, Paul does not regard election as conditioned upon God's prior knowledge of human choices. Dunn's comments here are very appropriate:

proginwvskw obviously means more than simply foreknowledge, knowledge before the event (as in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17). It has in view the more Hebraic understanding of "knowing" as involving a relationship experienced and acknowledged; hence commentators regularly and rightly refer to such passages as Gen 18:19, Jer 1:5, Hos 13:5, Amos 3:2, and 1QH 9.29-30 . . . [483].

Cranfield justifiably describes this as God's "electing grace" [1:431], and other examples of it may be found in Romans 11:2 and 1 Peter 1:2, 20.

That this foreknowledge is limited to the elect is demonstrated in Paul's statement that all who were foreknown in this way were predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ. Similarly, this same group was then "called," then "justified," and then "glorified." Our glorification is yet future, but it is certain enough that it can be described in past tense because it has already been foreordained of God according to verse 29 (glorification is the essence of conformity to Christ—2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21).

Each of these actions takes place through divine intervention. These are all acts in which He clearly takes the initiative. In light of this fact, His work of "calling" is of particular interest relative to the salvation of individuals. This is not a general "call" in the sense of "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14), but it seems to be rooted in the same concept of a "summons" or "invitation" [TDNT, 3:488]. Here the invitation is limited to those who are predestined for salvation, and all who are called in this sense are justified. Elsewhere this "calling" is consistently limited to Christians, highlighting the divine summons to salvation and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:9; 7:17-24; Eph. 4:1; Gal. 1:6; 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 1:9). The expression, "the called," is synonymous with "believers," and together the two terms reflect the divine and human roles in conversion (Rom. 1:6; Jude 1; Rev. 17:14).

In relation to conversion, "calling" appears to describe what theologians have referred to as "efficacious grace." It is the gracious work of God that is effective in what it is intended to accomplish. This is more theocentric and lacks some of the offensive connotations associated with "irresistible grace," but in both cases what is being described is the work of God that effectively brings an individual to belief in Christ. It is God's intervention, without which we would not have responded to the gospel.

What Paul demonstrates in Romans 8 is that we have a sure hope in Christ because salvation is fundamentally a divine work. Though we long for relief from the present state, in which we are afflicted by sin, mortality, or persecution, we can have great confidence in the certainty of ultimate deliverance. This encouraging word typifies the pastoral setting in which Paul discusses the concept of election.

### Israel, Election, and Assurance

Paul's comments in Romans 8 provide great encouragement to those who were experiencing persecution for their faith in Christ. In the same way, Romans 9-11 provides some measure of explanation, if not comfort, for those who share the apostle's despair over the lost. As noted above, this passage demonstrates both God's sovereign choice and mankind's free response.

There is no injustice with God, who endures the behavior of the lost in order to make more obvious the nature of His grace, mercy, and glory upon the elect (9:14, 22-23).

At the same time, "the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him" (10:12), and it is the responsibility of the Church to proclaim that message to the world so that people may hear and believe (10:14-15).

Balancing this fact, God has indeed proclaimed His truth to Israel in particular, yet they remain disobedient and obstinate (10:16-21).



That does not mean that He has rejected His people, however! Paul and other Jewish believers continue to constitute a divine remnant (11:1-5). In the meantime, the fact that most of the Jews did reject the gospel meant that the message was then proclaimed to the Gentiles (11:11; cf. Acts 13:46ff.). In this way, God uses even the unbelief of those who reject Him to eventually aid in the accomplishment of His purposes.

At the same time, this should be regarded as a temporary situation. The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, so His choice of Israel has not been abandoned (11:29). When the elect among the Gentiles "has come in," God's commitment to Israel will once again be evident in their acceptance of the gospel (11:12, 26).

It is appropriate that Paul concludes this section with praise for the wisdom and knowledge of God, fully recognizing that we are unable to comprehend His ways (11:33-36).

In this lengthy argument, Paul has attempted to address the very real apologetic and pastoral concern of the Jewish rejection of the gospel. His discussion does not consist of idle theological speculation any more than the assurances he presented in Romans 8. While defending the integrity of God's promises he provides a glimpse into the harmony of God's providential plan—even rebellion against God does not cancel His purposes, but ends up helping to accomplish them!

Paul's discussion also contains some strong exhortations for his readers. We should not think too much of ourselves, regarding ourselves to be wise because we have responded to the gospel (11:25). (This point may help set up his comments in chapter 12 about humbly working together in the body of Christ.) At the same time, his emphasis in chapter 10 on human responsibility serves as an important reminder that we are to be about the work of evangelism.

Summing up, the doctrine of election reassures us concerning the certainty of God's purposes and it prevents us from becoming boastful about our own salvation. This concept should never cause us to neglect evangelism, nor should it lessen our compassion for the lost.

## **Conclusion**

God's providential rule means that His purposes are accomplished even when He does not actively intervene in His creation. Under His providence even the sinful choices of His creatures may combine to produce a good result. At times, however, His purposes demand that He intervene to cause something to happen that would not occur in the normal course of events. The eternal salvation of individuals is the most obvious example of a situation in which divine intervention is necessary. Not only did He intervene in world history by sending His Son, He must intervene in the lives of individuals in order to bring them to faith. This is "special," not "common" grace. It is not directed toward the entire world, but only toward those whom God has chosen. He enables us to respond in faith, but does not contradict our will in doing so.

## ***Thought Questions***

1. Clark Pinnock writes, "I found I could not shake off the intuition that such a total omniscience would necessarily mean that everything we will ever choose in the future will have been already spelled out in the divine knowledge register, and consequently the belief that we have truly significant choices to make would seem to be mistaken. I knew the Calvinist argument that exhaustive foreknowledge was tantamount to predestination because it implies the fixity of all things

from 'eternity past,' and I could not shake off its logical force. I feared that, if we view God as timeless and omniscient, we will land back in the camp of theological determinism where these notions naturally belong. . . . Therefore, I had to ask myself if it was biblically possible to hold that God knows everything that can be known, but that free choices would not be something that can be known even by God because they are not yet settled in reality. Decisions not yet made do not exist anywhere to be known even by God. They are potential—yet to be realized but not yet actual. God can predict a great deal of what we will choose to do, but not all of it, because some of it remains hidden in the mystery of human freedom. Can this conjecture be scriptural?" (*The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, 25) Pinnock answered this final question in the affirmative. How would you respond? Does God know only that which is "actual?" Does His bank of knowledge grow as individuals make their choices?

2. Fritz Guy writes concerning Romans 8, "So in the Pauline language here, 'foreknow' means that in every instance 'God loves man before man loves God.' 'Predestine' means that God takes the initiative to remedy the human predicament. 'Call' means that God, through the proclamation of the gospel, invites human beings collectively and individually to participate in the actualization of the divine intention for them. 'Justify' means that God acts to restore the proper relationship between humanity and deity. 'Glorify' means that in the process of salvation God transforms human existence in a way that becomes increasingly evident and is ultimately completed" (*The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, 39). How is this interpretation different from the brief explanation provided above in the notes? Is it justifiable?

3. The issue of predestination comes up occasionally in discussions of apologetics or theodicy. Here is a fairly common question: If God must perform some kind of work in the heart of an individual in order to bring that person to faith, does this mean that those who do not receive this grace do not have the ability to repent and believe the gospel? If that is the case, then is it fair for God to make this demand of them (as He clearly does – Acts 17:30)? Stated another way, is God really trying to save every individual in the same way? Can either anyone really argue that God has acted so as to satisfy His desire that all would be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4)?

Our natural tendency is to respond to such questions with a philosophical justification for the universal fairness of God while allowing them to rob our zeal for evangelism. That does not seem to have happened to Paul. Why not? How do we maintain the biblical balance between sovereignty and responsibility with regard to such issues?

### ***Postscript: Selected Insights***

#### **John Calvin**

We must not suppose that there is a violent compulsion, as if God dragged them against their will; but in a wonderful and inconceivable manner he regulates all the movements of men, so that they still have the exercise of their will.

#### **Dwight L. Moody**

Revelation 22:17 reads, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." Regarding this verse, Moody wrote,

How many men fold their arms and say: "If I am one of the elect, I will be saved, and if I am not, I won't. No use bothering about it." I have an idea that the Lord Jesus saw how men were going to stumble over this doctrine of election, so after He had been thirty or forty years in Heaven He came down and spoke to John. One Lord's

Day in Patmos, He said to him, "Write these things to the churches." John kept on writing. His pen flew very fast. And then the Lord, when it was nearly finished, said, "John, before you close the book, put in one more invitation."

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